

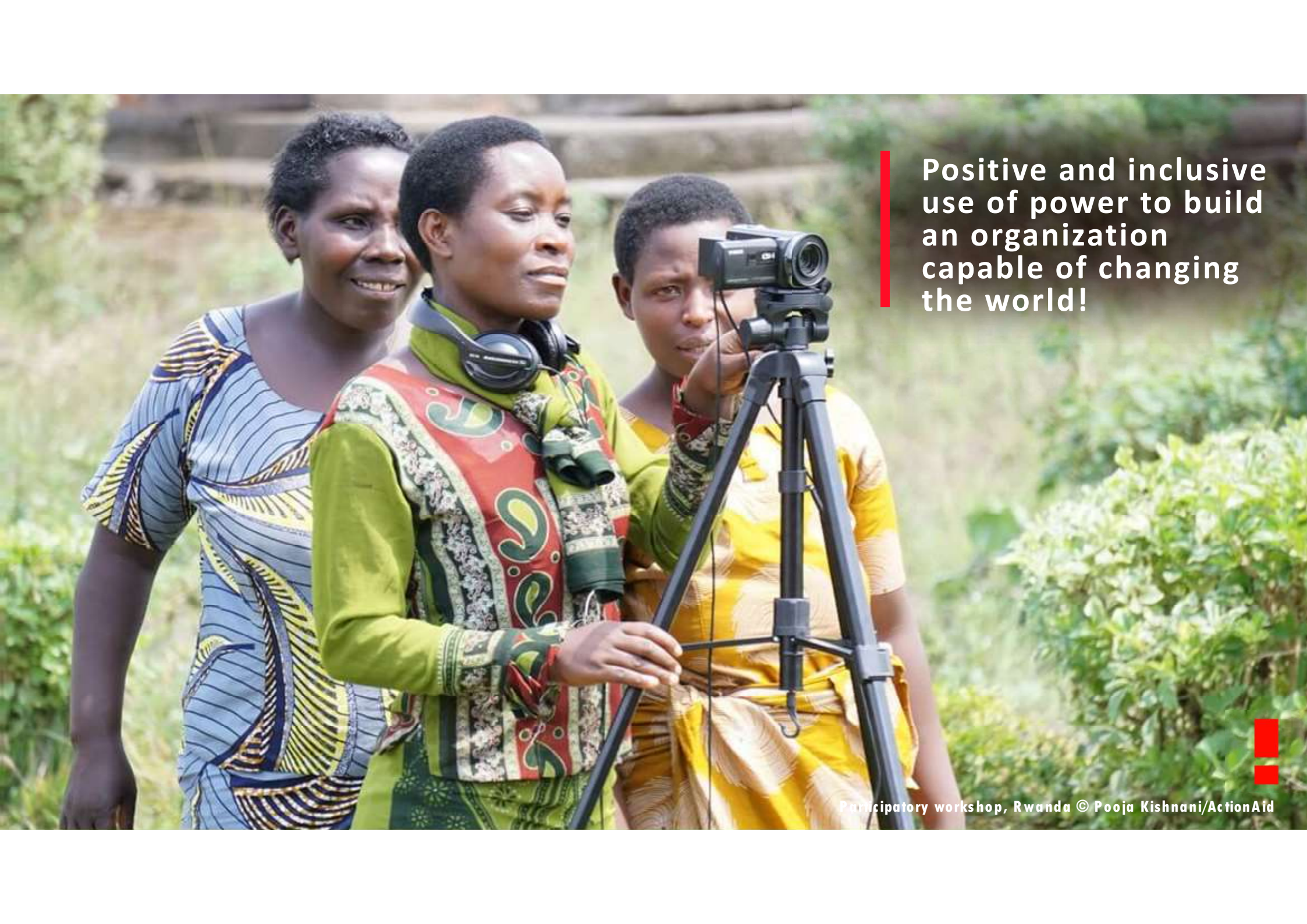
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Transformative Feminist Leadership

D S C Workshop, 12 May 2021

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Add photo caption & credit

A photograph of three women in traditional Rwandan clothing (kanga and umuho) standing outdoors. The woman in the center is adjusting a video camera mounted on a tripod. The woman on the left is smiling, and the woman on the right is looking at the camera. The background is a lush green field.

**Positive and inclusive
use of power to build
an organization
capable of changing
the world!**

Our journey

- **ActionAid began a decolonization journey in the early 2000s – governance, staffing, programming, budgets and resource allocation.**
- **In 2016 we put intersectional feminism at the core of our theory of change: achieving social justice by shifting power to oppressed and marginalized groups.**
 - **Intersectional feminism strives for the political, social, cultural and economic equality of all people, not just equality between women and men.**
 - **But, patriarchy sits at the heart of most unjust power structures we find in the world today. Dismantling patriarchy is key to achieving a just and sustainable future.**
 - **Patriarchy, racism and other forms of oppression are not just “out there”, we have all internalized them, so transforming ourselves is as important as changing larger institutions and systems.**
 - **Our Feminist Top Ten Basics represent our collective commitment to transforming ourselves as individuals and teams.**
 - **They are complemented by organizational policies and targets on e.g. bullying, harassment, equal opportunity, safeguarding etc.**

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The process

Co-creation and approval took about 1 year

- **Spearheaded by Women Directors' Forum**
- **Crowdsourced from a global group of volunteers (incl. do's and don'ts) – 3 months**
- **Validated and improved through consultation with all members – 4 months**
- **Final revisions and approval by cross-regional leadership body – 3 months**
- **Approved by International Board – 2 months**

Rollout and training ongoing since 2018

- **Workshopped with all national Boards during our General Assembly**
- **New post created in the Secretariat to spearhead rollout and continuing development**

Our Top Ten Basics: aspirational goals, not policies



Self-Awareness

Put your ego
in the
passenger
seat.



Self-care & caring for others

Take care of your
own emotional &
physical renewal.
Make sure others
do the same.



Dismantling Bias

“Check your
privilege”. Work
to dismantle the
biases you
uncover.



Inclusion

Create ways for
everyone to be
equally heard,
successful and
respected.



Sharing power

Make leaders out of
those “below” you in
the hierarchy. Give
trust and support to
those “above” you to
succeed in their
responsibilities.



Responsible and transparent use of power.

Clear, timely and
transparent
decision-making,
guided by what’s
best for the
mission.



Accountable Collaboration

Mutually owned &
clearly defined
goals, for which
everyone is held
accountable.



Respectful Feedback

Make feedback an
opportunity for
both sides to grow.



Courage

Seek out
transformative
change. Make
failure your fuel.



Zero Tolerance

... for any form of
discrimination or
abuse of power.

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Feminist Leadership IS ...

About power within

Digging deeper to build a team that can achieve difficult and extraordinary things together. This requires unusual levels of empathy and trust, which in turn requires self-awareness and self-care.

Enabling everyone to lead

Leaders should be measured by the extent to which they enable others to grow and lead

This requires deliberate and continuing work to surface and overcome privilege and bias

Something you're already doing

You probably already practice at least some of the Top Ten Basics, even if not consistently.

Totally new

Feminist Leadership draws on other approaches to effective management and leadership, particularly Transformative Leadership.

Feminist Leadership is NOT ...

Only *about* women

AAI had pre-existing initiatives around promoting women and people to senior jobs, and about rooting out discrimination, sexual harassment and bullying. These are crucial – but only the first step!

Only *for* women

Your gender identity doesn't determine your capacity to be a feminist leader.

Not all women practice feminist leadership

FL is learned, not innate - it doesn't come naturally to most of us.

Soft and cuddly

A feminist leader gives her team a unifying structure and clear rules and decision-making to play by.

A feminist leader is comfortable with conflict and knows how to channel it towards ideas and solutions, not egos.

"Disagree and commit" rather than endless consultation.

Totally new and different

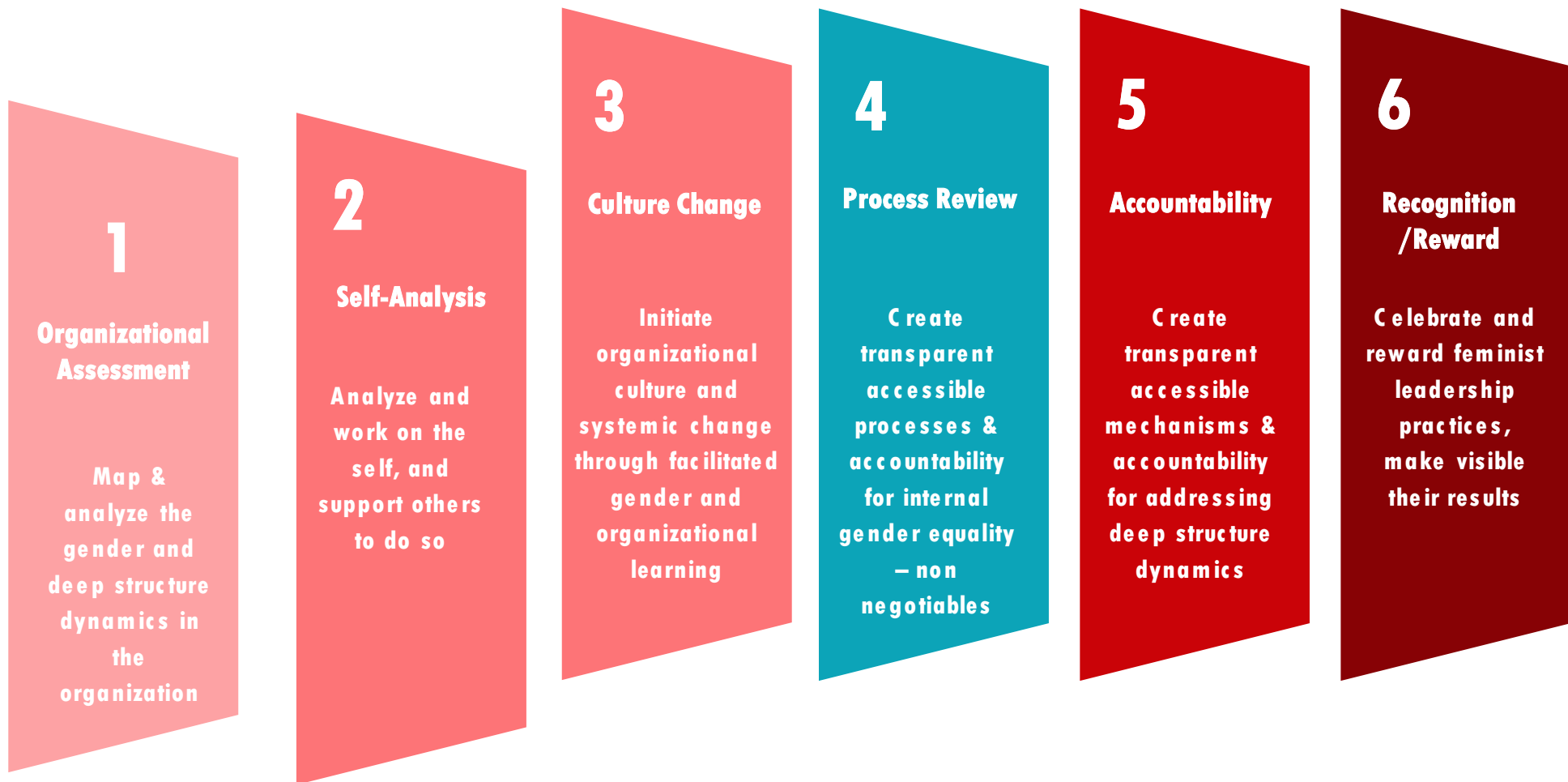
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Five dysfunctions of a team

(Patrick Lencioni)



A journey, not a destination ...



What makes for success? Country experiences

- Lead by example by embracing the Ten Principles of Feminist Leadership as personal and working on the self in a bid to become a transformative Feminist Leader.
- Consciously challenge the use of negative power that promotes oppressive environments by evaluating how we lead through a feminist lens.

- Move beyond conversations to identify and change deep-rooted habits, values and beliefs that reinforce unjust power relations in our work.
 - Embed FL more systematically into recruitment, JDs, performance evaluations, KPIs etc.
 - Use crisis (e.g. Covid overwork) as an opportunity for change.

- Adjust the principles and the implementation process to respond to what we're learning, both internally and from the world around us (e.g. anti-racism and decolonization debates).
- Create safe spaces to allow for continuous learning with reflection while making the necessary changes/tweaks along the way.

- Keep each other accountable!

What FL has to offer in the anti-racism and decolonization journeys

1. A language of accountability against racism
2. A starting point/guide in creating a safe space for the tough conversations
3. A guide to developing a framework for reviewing institutionalized racism
4. Reframing the work environment, with what is acceptable work behavior and what is not
5. Allowing the layered conversations and encouraging authenticity in the workplace regardless of background
6. Keeping leaders accountable for the process (dealing with institutionalized racism)
7. Consciously recognizing negative use of power
8. Creating shared vision, collective expectations and new practices around positive and equitable uses of power

What might be some blind spots?

1. In peeling back the many layers of power, control over resources (money!) has been the hardest for AAI to unravel. What is your organisation's inner layer?
2. Another tough one for us is invisible power based on cultural capital, race, education etc. Are we better at enabling some to people succeed than others? In AAI we recruit slightly more women Executive Directors than men, but African women are the most likely to leave early and anecdotally one reason is that they find it harder to build internal networks of influence.
3. Saviours (and saviourism) come in many forms. Our staff are almost all nationals of the country where they work, but that doesn't make us immune to certain approaches and assumptions that patronise or disempower partners and rightsholders.
4. What do YOU think?



Thank you!

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